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ABSTRACT

While Australian policy supports cultural diversity and promotes language instruction, public attitudes and the resources available for language education are not favorable. The lack of progress may be attributed in part to the nature of decision-making processes, resulting in unbalanced and ill-conceived policy. National language policy-making proposes a theory about the nature of society's language needs at the societal, group, or individual level, and how to meet those needs. Australian language policy has been more influenced by political and economic factors than by actual needs. The most fundamental reason for language learning is the mind-broadening effect of cultural exposure, followed by general educational enrichment, development of cross-cultural communication and cooperation, and economic development. Instruction in Italian is justified for the same reasons that any other language might be taught, and also because it is a major community language, a major world language, the language of a major trading partner, a language of great cultural significance, and one of the languages of the western civilization to which Australia owes much of its cultural, political, and social origins. (MSE)

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THE CASE FOR ITALIAN

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Opening address to the Conference on the Teaching of Italian in Queensland, Griffith University, 28-29 June, 1989.

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I Preamble:

It is timely to review the question of why languages should be taught in Australia, why, specifically, Italian should be taught, and what progress has been made in language teaching in Australia. I am grateful to the conference organizers for inviting me to do this in this opening paper. As I speak, it is very much from my stance within the national professional association of language teachers, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, which has, I believe, played a major role in stimulating changes in language education in Australia. I am pleased, in addition, to bring to the conference the best wishes of the AFMLTA and the greetings of the World Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (the FIPLV).

At first glance, there has been a quite dramatic change in language teaching in Australia in the last two years : new courses are springing up in many schools, money is flowing from Canberra for a variety of projects in all States and Territories, most States and Territories (though not Queensland) have articulated and adopted a State language education policy, the national policy on languages [Lo Bianco 1987] has been adopted and is being implemented, all States and Territories are seeking to introduce or extend language teaching in the Primary School, and in excess of 30 languages are being taught in schools [Lo Bianco 1987:28-9]. On the societal level, attitudes also seem to have changed. In the 1990's, Albert Monk, the then ACTU President, saw a major cause of social friction being

> "... fear that the presence of foreigners will undermine our own way of life ..."

and he went on to say that

> "Australian men and women ... are not reassured by hearing foreign languages spoken in public places"
>
> [Quoted in Bostock 1973:41]

About the same time, the then Prime Minister described the desirable social structure as

> "... the ideal of one Australian family devoid of foreign communities, thus preserving our homongeneity and solidarity as a nation".
>
> [Quoted in Martin 1972:14]

In marked contrast, a recent national survey published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs showed, amongst other things, that 95% of Australians regarded multiculturalism as a fact of life, 95% said no one should be disadvantaged on the basis of race or culture, 91% said Australians should be allowed to enjoy their own cultural heritage and share it with others, 90% said Government and community organizations should take more account of the diversity of the Australian population, and 71% said that the languages of the major cultural groups should be taught in schools [see Focus, No 5, June 1989 : 3].

Yet, all is not good : 1988 was marred by a bitter, even racist, immigration debate fuelled by self-seeking politicians trying, it seemed, to capitalize on the least desirable attitudes in society for their own electoral ends and by probably honest but equally deplorable academics and ex-soldiers. In addition, actual language enrolments remain depressed, far below a world average, and with little more than one in ten students learning a language to Survival Proficiency level, while the new initiatives taken are plagued by a severe shortage of teachers, by absurdly short and ill-conceived teacher re-training programmes in language and methodology, and by a lack of adequate materials and articulated courses. In addition, despite the focus on multicultural education in the 1970's and early 1980's with its projects and seeding grants to foster Italian and other community language teaching in schools, actual enrolments have shown only small numerical increase, the focus has now swung to Asian languages, and the influential Asian Studies Council in its recent National Strategy [Asian Studies Council 1988] made no reference to multiculturalism or community language teaching and only one slight reference to language maintenance [ASC 1988:26].

Clearly, the situation is confused, yet it is not incomprehensible : indeed, the project approach that has been used to encourage the teaching of community languages in the 1970's and now Asian languages at the end of the 1980's will inevitably have limited long-term effects because it fails to address comprehensively and coherently the issues involved and the nature of the decision-making process makes rational, coherent and comprehensive decisions unlikely to be achieved.

II Decision-making :

Perhaps the principal reason for this state of confusion and for the lack of substantial progress despite much activity rests in the nature of the decision-making processes that operate. Too often decisions involving language policy-making, language education policy-making, and language teaching seem to be made intuitively, in an ad hoc manner, on the grounds of political expediency or self-interest, and without a sufficient knowledge or research base. No matter how well meaning the decision-makers, this necessarily means that decisions will be inadequate, deficient in scope, and, at best, short-term in their effects. Some examples will serve to justify these claims.

First, as already noted, despite the funds allocated through the 1970's for community languages projects, enrolments are only marginally improved, many of the projects have disappeared, and, at least in Queensland, it is difficult to point to any widespread impact of multiculturalism on the school curriculum. In addition, one of the goals of multicultural education was to foster favourable intercultural and interracial attitudes. Backing their assertions with argument and evidence, this writer and others frequently pointed out in the 1970's that multicultural studies programmes designed to affect cross-cultural attitudes must include a significant component of language learning [eg, Ingram 1979]. Yet many multicultural programmes either ruled language learning out all together or relegated it to token programmes or a perpetuation of the long-established and ineffective secondary school programmes (eg, Queensland's multicultural programmes). Now, 10 to 15 years later, we

find that last year's immigration debate reflected apparently entrenched racist attitudes in the community; worse, it seemed to provide an excuse for such attitudes previously suppressed to be made overt, as happened when anti-Asian graffiti were daubed on the walls in the student facilities at Mt Gravatt Campus of Brisbane College of Advanced Education.

As a second example, one could note the recent syllabus in a high priority Asian language for tourist operators, developed by a committee set up by the Asian Studies Council : this syllabus committee contained only one applied linguist (the others were managers or business persons), the applied linguist's advice was largely ignored, and, further, the programme evaluation was carried out by one of the professionally untrained persons actually teaching on the course.

Third, a seminar in Sydney late last year on the teaching of Asian languages and cultures was told that business and industrial enterprises feeling the need for staff fluent in Japanese are bringing in Japanese nationals whereas a course in Japanese for Business also advertised last year by the Institute of Applied Linguistics in Brisbane CAE attracted just three applicants but it elicited many more from people wanting a course in French for Business.

As the final example of unbalanced and ill-conceived language policy development and implementation, one could note the present promotion of Asian languages, at least as presented to the public. It is certain that Australia needs many more people with skills in Asian languages, that all Australians need a far better understanding of the Asian-Pacific region, and that a much greater

proportion of students in school should be learning one or more Asian languages. However, there are many reasons to promote language study, and many of these go beyond trade promotion and understanding of the immediate world region. The simple facts are that we live in a small world, modern communications mean that our daily lives, the food we eat, the cost of our houses, our entertainment, almost everything we say or do or touch, is influenced by people and places in many different parts of the world. Furthermore, the Australian population is composed of people from almost every country in the world, and the dominant culture within Australia, the pattern of our institutions, and many of our beliefs and values originate from or have been profoundly influenced by French, German, Greek, Italian, Hebrew and many other languages and cultures from Europe and the Middle East. In other words, an informed, insightful and balanced education policy would recognize the diverse reasons for learning languages and the different array of reasons for language learning leading to a different choice of languages for different individuals, and would seek to offer a variety of languages and to facilitate the choice of languages that best fit an individual's interests and needs and best cater for the wide range of community needs. An informed policy would also start from and build on the fact that only about one child in ten currently learns another language in school long enough to attain Survival Proficiency and, if Australia's diverse needs are to be met, it should be a matter of persuading (indeed obliging) the other nine to choose from a wide variety of languages relevant to Australia's social, international and cultural needs rather than try to stop the one from learning the languages currently offered. Any policy which focuses around only one group out of the array of languages of critical importance to Australia and which, therefore, seeks to improve only one set of reasons for language learning on a population with diverse needs must be ill-founded. Being ill-founded and failing to meet

the comprehensive array of needs, it must fail as surely as any previous policy has failed that also favoured any other small group out of that array. The national policy on languages as written by Lo Bianco [1987] recognizes the diverse language needs in Australia and the diverse reasons for language learning, but the policy that is publicly promoted especially by the politicians seems to be attempting to extend Japanese, Chinese or Indonesian within the present pitifully small language learning system rather than improve and extend the system as a whole. The effect of this will be to destroy what little successful language teaching already exists without, in fact, replacing it with anything since, in many instances, Asian languages are being introduced with hastily and grossly inadequately trained teachers implementing hastily and ill-prepared materials : if this policy and practice were to succeed in being implemented, the poor methods and inarticulate teachers would cause a profoundly negative backlash against language learning and the last state of language education would be worse than the first.

Yet the solution to language problems should not be irrational, language policy-making and its implementation are prototypical of the whole field of applied linguistics which has its roots in scientific knowledge and linguistic and social theory, and its principles and practices are empirically testable.

In other papers and in a forthcoming book on language policy-making, I have argued in some detail for a rational, essentially applied linguistic, model of language policy-making [Ingram 1988; forthcoming]. The point is that decisions about language policy in general, language education policy, or language teaching itself need not be intuitive or ad hoc but are rationally

derivable from an understanding of the natures of the casual factors, in particular, the nature of language, the nature of the language user and learner, and the nature of the society and especially how the learner relates to the society.

Policy-makers make decisions about a society, its needs, the way the needs are to be met (if at all), and the future directions of change in the society. Language policy-making makes decisions about the language needs of the society and of the individuals who make up the society, what they are, how they are to be met (if at all), and how the language resources are to be managed (eg, maintained, developed, expanded or reduced). Expressed differently, policy-making is problem-solving, ie, it entails deciding how certain problems are to be dealt with. The "problems" language policy-makers seek to resolve include, amongst many others, such things as what languages to teach in schools, how to maximize the choice of language, how to maintain and extend the level of skills in a particular language, how to provide sufficient teachers of particular languages to meet the society's needs for skills in them or the desire of parents to transmit their language and culture to their children, how to ensure sufficient understanding of a client country's language and culture that exports are matched to the potential customers' needs and promoted to the customers in a way that will persuade them to buy, or how to foster in a society or between nations attitudes conducive to favourable, harmonious, inter-cultural and international relations.

In this sense of being problem-oriented, policy-making is essentially a practical activity but, like its parent discipline, applied linguistics, it is also theoretical in the sense that it is theory-based and theory-making. Rational decision- or policy-making is "theory-based" in the sense that, like applied linguistics [cf Ingram 1980], it draws on the sciences that inform the problem to be solved. In language policy-making, the contributory sciences include the linguistic sciences (eg, theoretical linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics) but also any other field that informs the language problem (eg, political science, demographic geography, psychology, economics, marketing, and so on depending on the particular problems to be confronted). The policy-makers' task is to draw on relevant sciences to elucidate the problem, ie, to gain insight into the essential nature of the problem and its possible solution or solutions. If this is to occur, then the policy-makers must have available the practical experience of the "problem" situation that makes the characteristics of the problem clear, and must have available the knowledge of the contributory fields that generate the insights that lead to its solution. This notion of decision-making or policy-making must lead one to question the "management principle" in decision-making, ie, the practice of putting "managers", bureaucrats, accountants, and general "educationalists" into decision-making positions rather than experienced and qualified practitioners, academics from the contributory fields, and similar experts. This approach to decision-making or policy-making is unlikely to be effective since, if decisions and consequent practice do not exist in or are not explicable within a rational context of theory (ie, if they are not explicable in a context of systematic

information or research about the reality that the practice is to serve), the necessary insights will be missing or inadequate and the decisions made or the policy formulated are less likely to be appropriate, that is, they are likely to be based on an erroneous or inadequate notion of reality and are therefore more likely to fail and to leave many of the needs they are intended to meet unsatisfied.

In the model of decision-making or policy-making being discussed here, the "decision" or "policy" is analogous to the "principles" established by the applied linguist in relating the problem-informing sciences to the solution of the problem or the development of methodology [see Ingram 1980]. In this sense, policy-making or decision-making is "theory-making" because the policy is essentially a theory about the nature of the problem to be resolved and how to resolve it. National language policy-making, for example, essentially proposes a theory or policy about the nature of the society's language needs (at the societal, group or individual level) and how to meet those needs. As a "theory", its validity has to be tested and hence evaluation is an essential phase in rational decision-making or policy-making.

Clearly, in this model of rational policy-making, the success of the policy depends on the validity of the insights generated from the fundamental sciences and the knowledge and expertise of the policy-makers. If the fundamental sciences relevant to the problem are deficient or not familiar to the policy-makers, it is less likely that the insights will be adequate or justifiable, the "theory" or policy is more likely to be defective, and the decision flawed. This argument again demonstrates the defectiveness of the "management" approach to policy-making or decision-making : first, no

matter how extensive the managers' training and knowledge of the fundamental sciences to gain insight into the problems to be solved, the decisions made, or the policies to be formulated, they cannot be sure of postulating adequate theories, making the correct decisions, or formulating appropriate or adequate policies. Equally, if they lack relevant experience, their understanding of the fundamental sciences is likely to be flawed, and they will also be unable to test out and evaluate their theories, decisions or policies vicariously. Second, though the "management" approach to policy-making is often said to be "practical", it is, in fact, profoundly impractical because it makes decision-making dependent on only certain aspects of the problem to be solved, especially managerial and financial aspects. At best in this approach, managers must be advised by experts but, unless they are fully open to expert advice, they are unlikely to be able to develop adequate insights to arrive at defensible and coherent policies or decisions. Until recently, the Asian Studies Council was subject to precisely this criticism though recently it has taken on a language teacher as an adviser and an AFMLTA nominee as a member. A similar criticism applies to the "interest-group" approach used in setting up the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education whose membership consists of persons nominated by interest groups and selected by politicians or bureaucrats and quite specifically excludes all of the small group of Australian applied linguists with international reputations in the area of language policy-making. It also excludes, except on its LOTE Sub-Committee which to date (June 1989) has never met, any official representation from the body of language teachers who could at least have served to inform the policy-making process.

In summary, the rational approach to policy-making entails a rational understanding of the issues involved, the development of insights into the problem to be resolved, thence the postulation of a "theory", "principles" or approach to solving the problem, the clear identification of the ultimate goal to be achieved, the intermediate objectives to be sought, and the implementation steps to be undertaken. This leads to the development of a methodology and techniques by which the objectives and ultimately the goals can be attained but, for the process to be complete and self-correcting of errors or inadequacies, it must also incorporate an evaluation process as an integral part of the decision-making process. This enables the attainment of the goals and objectives to be assessed, the validity of the "theory" and decisions to be judged, and, when necessary, the methods or even the fundamental sciences that have provided the initial insight into the problem to be re-assessed and adjusted. Such an approach is informed, rational and "theory-based". In addition, it is dependent on and inseparably involved with research, because, first, research develops the fundamental sciences, knowledge of which enables insights to be generated; second, research is needed to identify the nature of the problem to be resolved, the needs to be met, the goals and objectives to be sought, and the methodology or implementation procedures to be adopted to realize the policy; and, third, evaluation is a vital component of the process, it impacts on all stages of the model (including the fundamental sciences and the policy itself), and is, par excellence, research in action.

III Why Teach Languages

This discussion of language policy-making provides a context in which to consider the topic I was invited to address, viz, why languages should be taught and, specifically, why Italian should be taught. We have seen the pendulum of language education policy swing from so-called traditional European languages taught for educational, cultural and almost moral reasons to so-called community languages taught for societal and personal cultural reasons, and, most recently, to Asian languages taught for, it is continually asserted, economic reasons. The pendulum has swung violently like this because it was being pushed in one direction or another by persons, especially politicians, with little if any understanding of the issues (ie, their policies were not well based in relevant applied linguistic or social theory) but profoundly moved by electoral or economic interests - probably by their theory about how to win elections. A rational approach to policy-making would have brought more stability because the critical needs have not, in fact, changed significantly, nor has the nature of language or the learner : any changes have rather been in our understanding of these critical factors but these changes would have led to modification of approach towards greater efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the needs rather than to a pendulum-like swing from one set of languages to another with the adverse implications such pendulum-swings have for teacher supply, syllabuses, textbooks and materials.

The reasons for teaching languages have been so thoroughly canvassed over the last two decades as not to warrant extended discussion here. Lo Bianco in the national policy on languages groups them under four headings : cultural and intellectual enrichment; economic reasons related to trade and vocations; reasons related to equity, equality of opportunity and social justice; and external or international reasons related to Australia's role in the region and world [Lo Bianco 1987:44-62].

Perhaps the most fundamental reason for language learning is the mind-broadening effect of experiencing intimately another culture, of realizing that there are other logical ways of seeing the world, of categorizing reality, and of experiencing the insights into humanity and reality that are inherent in other cultures and, not least, in the verbal or visual expressions of great minds in other cultures. In a world where technological development demands attention in daily life and in education, this mind-broadening, humanizing aspect of language learning is of immense importance. Not least, in a world made small by technology, it is vital that all individuals, especially all educated persons, come to comprehend that they are inextricably interdependent with other people of other nations, of other races, and that their own nation and their own race are neither inferior nor superior to others, that all are intrinsically equal, equally logical and sensible, and equally worthy or equally worthless : the Beijing butchers, for example, are different only in power from the Tasmanian capitalist who says there are no ethics in business, only effective

or ineffective business practices and who, if the reported accusation should be true, also tried to destroy democracy but with dollars instead of tanks. Today no person and no nation is an island and it is an essential educational experience for a person to start to perceive this interrelatedness, to start to understand another culture, and to accept linguistic and cultural diversity as the norm. Ten years ago, the US President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies stated:

> "A nation's welfare depends in large measure on the intellectual and psychological strengths that are derived from perceptive visions of the world beyond its own boundaries ... an international perspective is indispensable".
>
> [Perkins 1979:457]

It is the experience of learning another language - any language but Italian equally with any other - that most effectively gives this mind-broadening experience because it enables the learner, from his first utterances, to step into another culture, to view the world through other eyes, and to feel the internal logic of another culture. No other component of the school curriculum can achieve this because all others, even Social Studies, leaves one outside looking in at the culture through the museum-glass of the individual's own culture.

No less important in the context of enrichment are the effects on educational attainment of language learning - again the learning of any language and Italian as much as any other. The theoretical and empirical evidence to support this assertion is now well established and well known. Theoretically, one would expect that the stimulus of switching from one linguistic system, from one world view, to another would enhance development in the same way as a language-rich and experience-rich environment enhances development. Empirically there is a multiplying mass of data accumulated in different educational, social and linguistic contexts in many countries to demonstrate that the experience of learning another language significantly benefits general cognitive development, creativity, cognitive flexibility, first language development, general educational attainment, and cross-cultural attitudes. The evidence has been summarized elsewhere [eg, Swain and Cummins 1979, Ingram 1986] and it suffices here to observe that, if Australia wants to maximize the personal development, creativity, and educational attainment of its children, it must ensure that they all experience good, effective second language learning over a sufficient period of time that they develop at least Survival Proficiency in the second language. Indeed, unless this is done, Australian children will be disadvantaged in comparison with the rest of the world and its economic and cultural development will inevitably suffer.

Integrally related to the mind-broadening reason for language learning is the need to foster in all persons those cross-cultural attitudes essential to a harmonious and rewarding life in a multicultural society and world.

A debate such as Australia experienced in 1988 over whether the nation should or should not be multicultural is irrelevant: the demographic fact is that the nation always has been ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse and the political fact is that its population will inevitably become more diverse as immigrants are received from new parts of the world and as new sources of refugees erupt. Indeed, the survey results released by the Office of Multicultural Affairs in its June 1989 issue of Focus demonstrate that the great majority of the Australian people not only recognizes this fact but accepts the concept of multiculturalism and wants the languages of the major cultural groups to be taught in our schools [Focus, No 5, June 1989:3]. In these circumstances, it is essential that the education system foster the development of favourable cross-cultural attitudes and the understanding of the other cultural groups that compose the Australian population.

The earlier discussion of the mind-broadening effect of good language learning would lead one to expect that language learning would help to foster favourable cross-cultural attitudes and, again, the theoretical and empirical evidence has been presented elsewhere [eg, Ingram 1979, 1980]. In brief, it suggests that second or foreign language learning benefits cross-cultural attitudes because it can facilitate equal-status interaction between people of different cultures and languages, it enables the language learner to step into another culture and to start to see the world through the eyes of the other people and to recognize their logic, and it enables the language learner, through this experience, to penetrate the superficial diversity of cultures to recognize the universal humanity that exists across cultures, to recognize that cultures are other ways of meeting the same human needs.

There is considerable empirical evidence to support the theoretical argument for the beneficial effects of appropriate language learning on cross-cultural attitudes. In a language learning project, for example, conducted at the then Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education in 1976, I found that a "community involvement" or "community interaction" approach to the teaching of French led to very significant changes in the students' cross-cultural attitudes not only to French people but generally [see Ingram 1979, 1980a]. Nevertheless, the nature and development of cross-cultural attitudes seem to be significantly influenced by, amongst other variables, the social context, the teaching methodology, the opportunity for interaction with native speakers, and the age of the learners. Consequently, it is difficult to generalize from most of the studies because of the number of variables and the differences within them and there is need for much more research into the structure of language teaching designed to effect favourable changes in cross-cultural attitudes. What is, however, clear is that Italian, as the major community language in Australia, has a vital role to play in an education system committed to fostering cross-cultural attitudes favourable to life in this multicultural society.

In recent years, we have heard much about the economic reasons for fostering language learning in Australia and for taking better advantage of those natural resources brought by or emanating from the immigration programme. Indeed, in the past I believe language teachers undervalued the vocational worth of language skills and cultural understanding and I have argued elsewhere that language skills and the understanding of other cultures should be seen as essential ancillary equipment for workers at all levels of industry and commerce [Ingram 1986]. Essentially, if we wish to sell to other people,

we must ensure that our products meet their needs, that negotiations are conducted effectively to our maximum advantage, and that we promote our products in the most effective language, that of the customers. For all these purposes, it is essential that all people at all levels of industry and commerce (from designers to negotiators to advertisers to policy-makers) understand the culture of the customers and speak their language. For almost 30 years, the Confederation of British Industry has stressed the importance of skills in other languages for British firms wishing to export [eg, Federation of British Industries 1962, 1964; Finlay 1973]. The US President's Commission said:

> "While the use of English as a major international language of business, diplomacy and science should be welcomed ... The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of the world's population neither understands nor speaks English ... Our vital interests are impaired by the fatuous notion that our competence in other languages is irrelevant ..." [Perkins 1979:458]

In the interest of effective trade and international relations, the European Community and the Council of Europe require all their members to foster language learning and make compulsory the learning of at least one of the European Community's languages [see Council of Europe, Committee of Members 1982:1-2; Recommendation No R(82)18; Hawkins 1981:181]. The Asian Studies Council has said of Australia:

> "Yet Asia is central to our trade, our foreign relations and our future ...

> "The proper study of Asia and its languages is about national survival in an intensely competitive world ..." [Asian Studies Council 1988:2

and the ASC goes on to set as a desirable objective that "Australians engaged in frontline business with Asia have a command of the relevant local language ..."

[Asian Studies Council 1988:4]

In brief, if Australia is to drag itself out of its economic mire, become effective in designing and selling products, and correct its gross imbalance of payments, it must increase its level of language skills and better utilize those it has available.

This need does not apply, however, only to Asian languages and cultures. Australia still aspires to sell to the rest of the world and, in any case, the European Community has already proved itself a formidable competitor, its effectiveness is already costing Australia dearly, this will be aggravated when the barriers are brought down in 1992, and it behoves Australia at least to understand this major competitor. Not least, other papers to be presented in this conference show that Australian trade with Italy has increased considerably though the balance remains heavily with Italy.

In the 1970's, considerable emphasis was placed on programmes to support language maintenance amongst L_1-LOTE speakers in the so-called ethnic communities. In themselves, such programmes are important and essential if natural language resources are to be maintained and developed and if children's development is to be maximized in ways that demand a rich educational experience in the first language. However, if they are to be effective in the long-term and if second language programmes are to be effective in creating and developing a pool of expertise in other languages, employment opportunities must recognize language skills as advantageous by giving employment preference and salary incentives. In addition, the English teaching system and the regulations governing recognition of overseas qualifications must be such as to enable people with skills in other languages to get into the workforce and to make use of their languages as a part of the package they offer to their employers.

In addition, however, the concept of equity implies that people who speak a language other than English should not suffer discrimination in gaining access to services. Consequently, frontline personnel in all types of service industry from shops to banks to hospitals require skills in other languages. Clearly, this is of particular relevance to Italian and implies, amongst other things, a need to have opportunities for such persons to learn Italian and, not least, for persons undertaking vocational training at a College, university or elsewhere to take "double majors" in Italian and their vocational area.

IV Why teach Italian

So far in this paper, I have tried to set the context in which decisions about language policy and language teaching should be made and have looked at some of the reasons for language learning (ie, some of the personal and societal needs that must be met). All that has been said applies to Italian as much as to any other language. In addition, however, Italian is justified as a priority language in Australia since it is a major community language, a major world language, the language of a major trading partner, a language of immense cultural significance, and one of the languages of the cradle of Western civilisation to which Australia owes much of its own cultural, political and social origins. No language policy or language education policy for Australia could be considered rational, coherent or comprehensive unless it recognizes a significant place for the teaching and learning of Italian as a first, second or foreign language.

V Some Implications

Before concluding, I wish to draw some brief implications for language policy and especially for language education policy in Australia.

First, though there has been great progress in language policy making in Australia in recent years, especially with the adoption of a national policy on languages and the formation of the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education, we have still not achieved either a fully articulated, rational policy or the structures to enable this to be achieved. Reference was made earlier to the structure of AACLAME.

Nevertheless, the recent announcement of the formation of the Languages Institute of Australia (LIA) will presumably do much to provide the essential information prerequisite to rational policy-making and the formation of a testing centre within the LIA will presumably make some contribution to the evaluation aspect of the policy.

Second, the current imbalance in the promotion of Asian languages needs urgent correction. This is not to say that the teaching and learning of Asian languages should not be expanded - on the contrary, I believe that the rate of expansion sought by the Asian Studies Council in its National Strategy (15% of students learning an Asian language by 1995) is unambitious and can not meet the needs for skills in Asian languages or attitude change in the community [Asian Studies Council 1988:21]. Nevertheless, there are many reasons for language learning, different individuals have different arrays of reasons for choosing a language, and, if the nation's needs are to be met, the policy must seek comprehensively to satisfy these and to provide all individuals with the opportunity to learn the language or languages that meet their needs. This implies a language learning system that is more thoroughly articulated, more systematic in its regional offerings, and more imaginative in its use of self-access facilities, ethnic schools and distance learning in order to increase and facilitate choice.

Third, proficiency and, specifically, the attainment of practical oral and written communication skills in the language must be seen as essential in all programmes or as an essential pre-requisite to all other aims.

Fourth, language skills should not be seen as ends in themselves but as essential ancillary skills for all persons in all or almost all vocations. Too often we, as language teachers and learners, have acted, spoken to our students, and devised courses as though the language is an end in itself. Language is always a means to other ends. This implies that language learning is not wasted if a language major fails to get employment as a language expert, teacher, translator or interpreter. On the contrary, language and cultural understanding should be seen as valued ancillary skills for all, for bankers and shop assistants, doctors and designers, business people and politicians. It is only when this occurs that Australian society, its educational, social and political policies, and its industries and commerce will be imbued with that understanding of its own people, its trading competitors and its trading partners that was argued earlier to be prerequisite to economic and social success.

Fifth, there need to be many more course types offered in order to meet the wide range of needs in the society. These should include traditional language classes, bilingual education, immersion programmes, bilingual sections, specialist courses in translating and interpreting, courses that are complementary to other vocational courses, traditional literature courses, and so on.

Sixth, Australian education like that in most other countries must insist that all students learn English and at least one other language. Whatever we do to improve language teaching methods, the reality is that language learning is a long-term and often arduous activity if a practical level of proficiency is to be attained in school programmes. In addition, if language learning

does have the beneficial effects that have been argued for it, then education decision-makers have an obligation to insist that children, who are not in a position to make the necessary judgements, be required to undertake significant language study, ie, not that they take a language for one or two unintensive years but that they be enabled to attain a useful level of practical skills in the language, at least to Survival Proficiency or, desirably, Minimum Social Proficiency on the ASLPR.

Finally, it is essential as language teachers seek to take advantage of the new opportunities and as they seek to rectify the deficiencies or limitations in the present language policy-making system that the profession remain united and mutually supportive. There is no doubt that many of the changes that have taken place owe their origin in whole or in significant part to the representations, the argument and the weight of numbers of the MLTA's and the AFMLTA. It would be diastrous if, at this time, any move were to occur which would fragment the profession. One has only, for example, to point to the in-fighting, the fragmentation of the profession, and the waste of effort that occurred (mainly in the 1970's and early 1980's) in those States where unilingual language teacher associations were formed. If it is the case in any State that an MLTA is not adequately serving all the language interests (this does not, I believe, apply to Queensland), then those language interests should seek to have the MLTA re-structured or re-organized to better meet their needs. It is essential, I believe, that language teachers recognize the commonality of their aims and endeavours and seek to be mutually supportive.

VI Conclusion:

In this paper, I have sought to provide a context within which issues affecting Italian can be considered. Language teachers must remain confident, not just because our activities seem at present to be going through a period of public approval, but because we do serve a vital purpose in this society and in the world. World history is littered with the war refuse that results from hatred between nations, from a failure to understand and to communicate. We provide that bridge between cultures and between peoples that can and must lead not only to more profitable trade, but also to that understanding and acceptance which is pre-requisite not only to trade but, more importantly, to social and world harmony. Moreover, that understanding does not come from scientific knowledge or the accumulation of social data or geographical fact but from the largely sub-conscious perception that other people can see the world logically in other ways and that the differences we think we see in people are largely alternative ways of realizing the same human needs and characteristics as our own. I often think that one of the best, if unwitting, expressions of this essential process as cultures and people mix through language learning was the comment by a 7-year old girl some years ago when she went back to her mother's country of birth after some years of absence. She said:

> *"We stayed for two days in Port Moresby in middle-sized Paia Paia's house. It was a little house in Gerehu. It was pretty and ugly at the same time. At first it was ugly, when I first came, but after a while it became pretty".*

I wish you well for the conference and thank you for listening to me.

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